

August Recess Toolkit: Faith Actions for Immigration Reform

Overview

People of faith have been extremely important in organizing thousands of congressional visits, prayer vigils, creative actions, and phone calls to urge Members of Congress to support immigration reform. Congress will be in their home districts August 2nd - September 8th, and we know that anti-immigrant groups will be mobilized more than ever to get Congress to drop immigration reform. We can't let anti-immigrant groups win the "space" we have created in the public or in Congress - we must maintain our momentum and make sure Congress hears that they must enact immigration reform that reunites families and creates a path to citizenship - and they must act NOW!

The Senate Has Acted - Now the House of Representatives Must Act

Although many have major concerns about the border security, eligibility requirements and fees to adjust status in S.744, the Senate has made an important move forward in passing a bill with a path to citizenship for our undocumented community members. Our focus has moved to the House of Representatives. Five bills have been approved by House committees, none of which create a path to citizenship. One particularly harmful bill is the **SAFE Act** which would make Arizona's SB 1070 the law of the entire country, criminalize churches, friends and neighbors who help undocumented immigrants, and expand immigrant detention. The House Judiciary Committee will also be considering the KIDS Act, which could create a path to citizenship for some undocumented children, but not their parents. We are waiting to see if the bi-partisan "Gang of 7" in the House will introduce a bill of their own. It is incredibly important to engage people of faith in speaking directly with their Representative and staff, many of whom need much more education about immigrants and the support for immigration reform in their districts. August is a pivotal time to educate Representatives about how people of faith welcome and care about immigrants in their communities, and to use local media and social media to educate the public about the need for immigration reform. We want to urge our Representatives to "give us a vote on citizenship" and enact immigration reform.

Four ideas for action include:

1. **Congressional Visits & Letter Drops**: Schedule in-district meetings with members of Congress and their staff to share your stories and urge them to support immigration reform. See the IIC's **Neighbor-to-Neighbor Toolkit** for resources. Can't get a meeting scheduled? See resources below for help planning a letter drop off so your Representative will know people of faith care about immigration reform!

2. **Raise Visibility at Congressional Town Halls**: Organize your friends, neighbors, and fellow congregants to attend and speak at town halls to urge your Representative to support immigration reform. **Call your Representative** to ask when and where their Town Halls will be held. Preliminary list: www.interfaithimmigration.org/2013/07/24/list-of-town-hall-meetings.

3. **Signs of Change**: Come up with a unique message in support of immigration reform for the move-able type sign in front of your church, synagogue or mosque. Take a picture of the sign and email it to signs@interfaithimmigration.org or post it on the **IIC Facebook Page**. Encourage everyone to "vote" for your sign - the photo with the most Facebook shares, Likes, Tweets, or Pinterest Pins wins!

4. **Sermons & Prayers for Immigration Reform**: August is a great time for faith leaders to speak with their congregations about the scriptural call to love our neighbor, welcome immigrants and act for justice. Also, keep bringing people of faith together for **Prayer Vigils** for immigration reform at a symbolic public place, including your Representative's office.

* Please let us know about your actions! Email rpizatella.cws@gmail.com or sign up at www.interfaithimmigration.org/state-resources/register-your-public-action-vigil

Also, be on the lookout for an upcoming action: **FAST Action for Immigration Reform!** We need to get the word out now that people of faith across the country will engage in constant prayer, fasting and expansive action for 40 days starting when Congress returns from recess on September 9th and lasting until October 18th. Individuals, congregations and study groups can get more information and sign up to participate in the fast at fastaction.us.

Letter Drop: Urge Your Representatives to Support Immigration Reform

The United Methodists are organizing an August Letter Drop action for in-district Congressional offices. Here is a link to the [form letter](#). You should feel free to change and add about your groups' ministries among immigrant communities. These drop-offs can be done as part of, in addition to, or separate from a local [Neighbor to Neighbor](#) visit (sample talking points on last page). Groups are encouraged to use this with your congregation and to reach out to 3-4 other congregations to join with you in doing this in August!

Here are steps on how to make a letter drop. For more information, contact Bill Mefford, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church: bmefford@umc-gbcs.org

1. With others from your congregation or organization, read through and shape the letter to best describe all your community does to welcome immigrants. Make sure to list yourself or another member of your congregation as the point person with the correct address is at the top of the letter so you can receive the reply from the member of Congress.
2. Find out who your Representative is at www.house.gov.
3. Work with others in your congregation or community group to choose the best day to place the letter in a high-traffic area so people can read and sign it.
4. Before you lay it out for the everyone to sign, have those you know are interested or engaged in this issue (including faith and community leaders) sign the letter. People will more likely sign something when they already see other names on there!
5. Make sure an announcement is made about the letter in the congregation bulletin, from the pulpit, and through social media. THE most effective way to get folks to sign is through personal invitation. You and others should personally invite folks to sign the letter!
6. Look on your Representative's website (find it at www.house.gov) and find the local office nearest to you to either schedule a meeting with the Representative or a staff person, or even to simply find out the hours when they are open, so that you can drop off the letter when the office is open.
7. When you get to the office here is a possible script: *"Hi, my name is [NAME] and I am a member of [Congregation/Group] in [City], and many of our members signed this letter urging Representative [NAME] to support immigration reform with a path to citizenship. Will you please make sure the Representative and staff who handle immigration see this letter?"*
8. Email bmefford@umc-gbcs.org with a copy of your signed letter, and we will make sure their Washington, DC office receives a hand-delivered copy as well!
9. Share this toolkit with at least 3 other congregations in your district and in nearby strategic districts and urge them to do this as well. This will make an impact with a number of faith communities engaged. And make sure they let me know when they drop off their letters! Email them this message and then call them for the best effect. Nothing beats a phone call to get folks moving!
10. When you (or the point person for the letter) receive a reply from your Representative, please share that with bmefford@umc-gbcs.org as well, as we are counting votes in the House and a reply from your Representative will be hugely helpful!

Lifting up the Faith Voice in Town Halls

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD AT A TOWN HALL MEETING

Many Representatives host Town Hall Meetings while they are in their home districts during the month of August, to hear from their constituents on important issues. This August, immigration reform is likely to be a frequently discussed topic, and we need to make sure that our Representatives hear loud and clear that people of faith support immigration reform. We already know that anti-immigrant groups will be present at these Town Hall Meetings, and we need to be more fully present, engaged and vocal than them to ensure our Representatives that they should support immigration reform. By asking questions about immigrants' rights, we will remind both Representatives and those attending that the way this nation treats immigrants is important not only to newcomers, but also to people of faith. When Representatives know that their constituents want immigration reform, it will help them encourage House leadership to prioritize time for a vote on citizenship!

Follow these easy steps to get involved:

1. **Call your Representative** to ask when and where their Town Halls will be held. Preliminary List: www.interfaithimmigration.org/2013/07/24/list-of-town-hall-meetings.
2. Invite other community members who care about immigration reform to attend with you. Make signs, wear t-shirts, and find creative ways to visual display that you are a person of faith who supports immigration reform.
3. Get there early and sit near microphones. Don't all sit together - it will help show that there is not just one group that supports immigration reform, but many from all over the community
4. Prepare your question(s) ahead of time and write them down, in case they only take written questions. Have some facts at your fingertips and include them when you ask your questions, along with a story about why you care or someone impacted in your community.
5. Raise your hand to ask a question and keep your hand up until they give you time to speak. Find a way to be heard by cheering for others' questions, making a lot of noise in order for them to give you time to speak, and talking with the Representative or their staff afterwards, emphasizing that you and many people of faith want to see immigration reform.

Signs of Change: Show your congregation's Support for Immigration Reform

Congregations across the country are invited to join a *Signs of Change* effort during the August recess. Get your creative minds together and come up with a unique message in support of immigration reform. Use your congregation's sign that normally announces events or sermon titles to provide a public witness with a faith message in support of immigrants' rights. The message could be directed at your Congressional representative or it could be a sign of solidarity with our immigrant community members.

Sample messages are below, but get creative and think of your own!

- The Bible: God's Handbook to Welcome Immigrants
- Our faith calls us to love *all* our neighbors: Immigration Reform Now!
- Jesus was Undocumented. We're Praying for Citizenship Now.

If you don't have a permanent sign like this, don't let that stop you. Make and hang it out in front of your church. Maybe artists in your congregation or community can help work on it!

The next step is to take a picture of the sign and post it on your congregations' Facebook page, as well as the [IIC Facebook Page](#) or just email it to signs@interfaithimmigration.org and we'll get the pictures posted on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. Encourage your congregation and community members to **VOTE** for your sign by sharing it on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. Anyone can vote! The photo with the most Facebook shares, likes, Re-Tweets, or Pinterest Pins wins two flights for the next DC Advocacy Fly-In Day!

This *Signs of Change* initiative will create a "buzz" on social media, and potentially traditional media as well, to strengthen the push for immigration reform during this important August recess. So get thinking and show your community - and the online community - your congregation's support for immigration reform with a great sign!

Check the [IIC Facebook Page](#) for more details soon!

Below are examples of signs to help inspire you to craft your own message. While not all are about immigration, they provide examples of how creative signs can send a strong message!



Speak with your Congregation about Immigration Reform & Host Prayer Vigils

Sample prayers, sermon starters, scripture studies and readings from prior actions:

- [Immigrant Sabbath Toolkit from Interfaith Immigration Coalition, May 2010](#)
- [Sermon Starters, Theological Reflections & Lessons from IIC DREAM Sabbath Toolit](#)
- [Prayer resources from 2009 Interfaith Immigration Coalition Holiday card campaign](#)
- [Call to Worship, Prayer Petitions & Suggested Readings from March 2010 Interfaith Service](#)
- [Bible Migrants Profiles & Guide for Bible Migrants Study](#)
- [Reflections on Scriptural texts on immigration](#)
- [Interfaith Worker Justice: Celebrating Immigrants -includes prayers and songs](#)
- [All Souls, Immigration Challenges: Welcoming the Stranger](#)
- ['I was a stranger and you welcomed me...' Sermons, Bible stories, from Sojourners](#)
- [Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church & the Bible by Daniel Carroll, Sojourners Study Guide](#)

Prior Sermons on Immigration

- [Let's Talk About Family](#), Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo, Columbus, Ohio, 07/21/10
- [A Process of Peacemaking](#), Jen Smyers, First Presbyterian Church of Cheyenne, 10/02/11
- [Welcoming the Stranger: Pastoral Letter from Episcopal Bishops of Maryland](#)
- [Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations: sampling of immigration related sermons](#)

Video, Workshop & Online Resources

- [Gospel without Borders from EthicsDaily.com](#)
- [Video & print resources for conversations on immigration, Disciples of Christ](#)
- [Engaging Impasse on Immigration Workshop](#)
- [The Naked Alien \(Blogsite\) – Raw faith: poetry, photography, and free-range theology](#)
- [Colorado Council of Churches: Who is my neighbor? – video designed for congregations](#)

Prayer Vigils for Immigration Reform

Hosting prayer vigils around the country provides people of faith an opportunity to reflect on the deep scriptural, spiritual roots of our work to support immigrants' rights and highlight the real-life consequences of our failed policies. Family Unity Vigils are part of a larger strategy to express to our elected officials in Congress that humane immigration reform is a top priority for people of faith.

Your prayers will be joined by the prayers and actions of other people of faith around the country. We ask you to focus on three areas of concern:

1. Humane immigration reform that prioritizes family unity and creates a path to full citizenship
2. Empowerment of people of faith to speak out more boldly for immigrants' rights
3. Moral courage for members of Congress to show leadership by voting for immigration reform

Drawing on the faith traditions and rituals can make vigils much more powerful, raising the creative and dramatic tension. Use images and symbolism that draw attention and showcase the powerful solidarity people of faith show in working for immigration reform. Here are some examples:

- Ask Clergy attending to wear collars, stoles, robes and any other appropriate attire
- Foot washing of individuals impacted by immigration policies
- Procession with candles to symbolic location
- A Prayer Wall with handwritten prayers for family unity and full citizenship
- Utilize special events (e.g. Valentines with hearts that say "love thy neighbor")
- Invite lawmakers to read scriptures/ sacred texts supportive of immigrants' rights
- Lift up stories from community members and compare to stories in sacred texts
- Highlight passages in scripture and present to members of congress
- Collect and deliver prayers for humane immigration reform to your senators and representatives
- Make visuals – photos, drawings, art, etc. that show the consequences of immigration enforcement policies and family separation

See the IIC's [Family Unity Prayer Vigil Toolkit](#) for additional resources.

Utilize Media to Broaden your Reach: See the IIC's [Communications Toolkit](#)

SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY TEMPLATE

For Immediate Release:
August XX, 2013

Contact: NAME, PHONE ##

*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

Date, time Location

Hundreds of faith leaders from across the U.S. march in Long Beach for immigration reform

Long Beach, CA—As the Senate completed its final vote and the House begins deliberations on immigration reform, hundreds of faith leaders from across the country and immigrants' rights advocates will march in Long Beach to the local ICE Office, Long Beach City Hall and the office of Congressman Alan Lowenthal.

The faith leaders and advocates will call for immigration justice, family unity, and the full inclusion and protections for workers. Clergy, community leaders and impacted individuals will join in symbolic ritual, prayer and singing to voice opposition to harsh immigration enforcement policies that have left 1.4 million people deported over the last four years causing thousands of family separations.

WHAT: Faith Leaders from [CONGREGATION] Urge Representative [NAME] to support Immigration Reform

WHEN: DATE AND TIME

WHERE: LOCATION

SPEAKERS: NAMES & TITLES

VISUALS: What interesting visuals that photographers and videographers will be able to capture

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OPINION EDITORIALS

OpEds are great ways to raise your voice within your community and to your Representative. Submit your Op-Ed 4-5 days before you hope it would be placed, since there is usually a queue from others who have submitted on a similar issue. It's helpful to have it signed by 2-3 faith or community leaders, the more well known they are, the more likely it is to get placed. If you would like help with an Op-Ed please contact straynham@cwsglobal.org. As examples, some recent OpEds include:

Citizen's Voice: Susan Montgomery: Implementation of 287(g) program a backwards idea
www.knoxnews.com/news/2013/jul/13/citizens-voice-susan-montgomery-implementation-a/

Florida politics haunts immigration issue By Rev. Russell Meyer, Florida Council of Churches
www.miamiherald.com/2013/06/20/3462039/florida-politics-haunts-immigration.html

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: Facebook is great for sharing pictures, articles, and event information. Search Facebook for other local coalitions or DREAMer groups in your area so that you can plan actions and cross-publicize your events. When you have an event, take photos at the event and be sure to post them to your group's Facebook page. Tag friends in the photo as a way to show their support for the event. Use Facebook app on smart phone to load photos and quotes quickly directly from the event. "Like" the [Interfaith Immigration Coalition](#) on Facebook to receive up-to-date alerts.

Twitter: Twitter is a great tool for sending updates, articles and short (140 character) messages directly at politicians and groups. Find your Representative's [Twitter](#) name on their website (www.house.gov and tweet @[their twitter name]. Twitter posts are organized around hash tags, which help create Twitter trends. You can use hash tags as part of your message, or at the end of a Tweet. Some good immigration reform hash tags to use: #ImmigrationReform #TimelsNow #familyunity #p2c #pathtocitizenship #faith4citizenship #CIR. Regularly tweet @ your Representative. Here are some sample Tweets:

- The #TimelsNow that we treat all people w/ respect & create a #pathtocitizenship for immigrants!
- My Faith Tradition tells me to welcome the sojourner and love my neighbor #faith4citizenship
- I'm here to let @Representative_NAME know it's been too long. It's time for a #pathtocitizenship.
- [@Raul_Labrador](#) As a person of faith from Idaho I support #pathtocitizenship & #familyunity.

Follow [@InterfaithImm](#) on Twitter to receive up-to-date alerts and information.

Make an Impact: Share your Story!

Please send us photos of you, your congregation and community members, along with stories (no longer than a page). We will put them all together and deliver to key Representatives to ensure they know that people of faith care about immigration reform. This will bring personal stories of how the current immigration system has broken up families, and what communities are doing in response.

Questions to guide your story writing.

- 1) Why the issue of immigrant justice is important to my congregation, conference or denomination?
- 2) Who do I have a personal relationship with and how has their story of being impacted by our broken immigration system influenced my outlook?
- 3) How does the issue of immigration relate to my faith perspective?

Please send stories and photos to CWS intern grant.aubrey@gmail.com.

Upcoming August Recess Actions/Events/Meetings

Florida In-District Congressional Meetings – August 5-12

In-district meetings with Florida Congressional offices are being organized the week of August 5-12. Here are the details:

- Monday, Aug. 5: Meetings with Reps Mica and Webster (Central FL, times TBD)
 - Thurs, Aug 8: Meetings with Bilirakis(morning) and Young(afternoon) Tampa Area
 - Friday, Aug 9: Meetings with Buchanan (11:30- Sarasota) and Rooney 3:30 (Port Charlotte) both confirmed!
 - Monday, Aug 12: Meetings with Ros-Lehtinen(10:45) and Diaz-Balart(both in Miami, confirmed!)
- Email JToth@uua.org with the Unitarian Universalists if you want to join!

Houston, Texas – Week of August 19

Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Service is organizing an action in Houston the week of August 19. Contact FOlagbaju@lirs.org for more details.

Omaha, Chicago, Cincinnati, PA, NY, and NJ – Late August/Early Sep

The Sisters of Mercy are going on the road with a bus tour in late August and early September with stops in Omaha, Chicago, Cincinnati, PA, NY, and NJ. For more information on connecting with the tour contact: rmurphy@sistersofmercy.org.

September 1 – Preach about Immigration

The Episcopalans are organizing and encouraging Congregations to preach on Immigration for Labor Day Sunday, September 1. For more details, contact kconway@episcopalchurch.org.

Faith-Based Immigration Talking Points for House of Representatives

Path to Citizenship

- People of faith strongly support a pathway to full citizenship for our undocumented community members. Such a pathway should be clear, timely, direct, and accessible.
- Proposals that would create a pathway to legal status but stop short of citizenship are not consistent with who we strive to be as a nation, nor with how people of faith live out the scriptural commandment 'to welcome the stranger'.
- Communities of faith witness daily the pride that citizenship classes and naturalization ceremonies bring to our immigrant brothers and sisters. Second-class status would mean that instead of helping our community members foster patriotism by studying U.S. history and civics for the citizenship exam, we would have to tell them "you'll never really be an American." That is contrary to the core principles of liberty and equality on which this country was founded, and to our national identity as a "land of opportunity."
- More than 7 in 10 Americans support a path to citizenship (Gallup News Service, 2/5/13)

Family Unity

- Families are the fabric of strong communities and economies. Immigration reform must facilitate family reunification. Family unity spurs integration, as families provide strong foundations for learning English, purchasing a home, pursuing employment, starting a business, preparing children for school, and contributing to communities.
- We are not opposed to increases in employment-based visas, but they should not come at the expense of family visas - it's not a zero-sum game. People want to join their families through legal channels, but with wait times as long as 24 years, have no real options to do so. To fix the immigration system, we need to recognize the God-given desire to be with one's family.
- We are opposed to proposals that would eliminate the ability of U.S. citizens to sponsor their siblings, found both in the Senate bill and in the SKILLS Act as it passed the House Judiciary Committee. Brothers and sisters should be able to be together. Our sacred texts show the significance of a unified family. Mary & Martha and disciples Simon Peter & Andrew, as well as James & John are examples of siblings remaining close as adults.

Align the enforcement of immigration laws with humanitarian values

- While all laws need to be enforced to be effective, the way that we enforce our laws must have integrity and reflect the best of American values. We can implement common-sense and humane guidelines; end unsafe deportations in the middle of the night and substandard detention conditions, and establish alternatives to detention and access to due process for those trying to navigate our complex immigration system.
- Programs that burden local law officials with enforcing federal immigration laws, such as those called for in the SAFE Act, erode trust between officers and the communities they serve. When police are seen as immigration enforcement agents, communities are less safe because many community members stop reporting crime out of fear that they, their family members or their neighbors might be arrested because of their immigration status.
- The U.S. has dramatically increased deportations, fences, border patrol officers, and immigration detention, spending over \$18 billion of taxpayers' money last year alone. It is now time to truly fix the broken immigration system by improving the efficiency of ports of entry, expanding visa availability, and eliminating application backlogs. Rather than spending additional funds on costly border security measures, we should address the root causes of migration, including economic disparity. The reality is that the factors that fuel migration will not be quelled by increased border security measures. Multi-faceted reforms are necessary.

Economic Benefits of Immigration Reform

- Immigration reform will decrease the deficit by \$175 billion in the first 10 years and by nearly \$700 billion over the following 10 years, and increase GDP by 3.3 percent. [[CBO, 6/13](#)]
- Immigrant-owned small businesses employed 4.7 million people in 2007 and generate more than \$776 billion annually. [[White House 7/12](#)]. Immigrants have paid \$150 billion into Social Security and more than \$50 billion in taxes. [[Yahoo Finance 3/14/13](#); [White House 5/11](#)]

More information by state: www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/economics-immigration-resource-page